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ABSTRACT

A cross-cultural study was undertaken to examine levels of communication apprehension reported by five- to eleven-year-old subjects in the United States and Sweden. The approach was twofold: the examination of elementary age subjects and the use of their native language. The Personal Report of Communication Fear was administered to 186 males and 183 females in the United States and to 207 males and 199 females in Sweden (where it was translated into Swedish). Results revealed a significant main effect for culture, with Swedish subjects showing greater communication apprehension than American subjects. Second, age appears to be a significant variable in the increase of apprehension--apparently children learn to be more apprehensive toward communication as they grow and develop. Third, although a significant interaction among the variables of culture, age, and gender was found, no pattern of gender differences emerged. This study suggests that significant amounts of apprehension developed and increased in the early years and indicates the need for further research to determine appropriate prevention and therapy and to determine cultural characteristics that may cause or prevent the development of communication apprehension. (A three-page reference list and data tables are included). (NKA)

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Comparison of Communication Apprehension Across Cultures:
American and Swedish Children

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Abstract: This study explores levels of communication apprehension reported by 5- to 11-year-old subjects in the United States and Sweden. The Personal Report of Communication Fear was administered in the native languages, and the effects of culture, age, and gender were examined. Significant main effects for culture and age were found: Swedish subjects were more apprehensive than American subjects, and older subjects (ages 9-11 years) were more apprehensive than younger subjects (ages 5-8 years). The ANOVA yielded no significant main effect for gender and no significant 2-way interactions; however, a significant 3-way interaction was found. Tukey post hoc analyses revealed that Swedish older males were significantly more apprehensive than American younger males, American younger females, and American older males; and Swedish older females were significantly more apprehensive than American younger males.

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COMPARISON OF COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION ACROSS CULTURES:
AMERICAN AND SWEDISH CHILDREN

Background of the Problem and Related Research

Communication apprehension (CA), variously labeled stage fright, reticence, or shyness, is the fear or avoidance of human interaction through oral communication. Studies show significant numbers of elementary and secondary age children (McCroskey, 1977; Wheelless, 1967) to be affected by this problem. The condition is also found in adult and older populations (McCroskey & Richmond, 1979; Moore, 1972) and with business and professional individuals (Richmond, 1977). Research suggests that communication apprehension may cause individuals to withdraw from communication situations, score lower than average on academic tests (McCroskey & Andersen, 1976), choose occupations in which comparatively less communication occurs, achieve less status in the business world (Daly & McCroskey, 1975), and select housing locations remote from population centers (McCroskey & Leppard, 1975). Personality characteristics which appear to be negatively correlated with CA include confidence, emotional maturity, and self-control (McCroskey, Daly, & Sorensen, 1976).

While the effects and correlates of communication apprehension in adults have been adequately explored, the etiology of the phenomenon has been more difficult to establish. Studies suggest that the onset of communication apprehension may occur during childhood and be

linked to home and school environments and to cultural influences. With the impact of culture influencing the development of all aspects of the individual's life, this variable would seem to be an important determinant of communication apprehension. Most cultural studies, however, have dealt with college-age subjects. Moreover, many cultural studies have measured apprehension levels of English-speaking foreign subjects, e.g., Japanese, Korean, Filipino (Klopf, 1984). Few studies, if any, have explored the degree of CA among foreigners when assessed in their native languages. The examination of the responses of younger subjects to the CA measure in their native language may offer a more representative comparison of levels of CA across cultures. The present study examined the levels of communication apprehension among American and Swedish elementary school children. The measure of CA was the Personal Report of Communication Fear (PRCF) (McCroskey, Andersen, Richmond, & Wheelless, 1981), which was administered to American children in English and translated into the Swedish language for administration to Swedish subjects. The effects of culture, age, and gender were explored.

Origins of Communication Apprehension in Children

The increase in apprehension during elementary grades has been documented. Shaw (1967) observed that older elementary students (grades 4-6) exhibited more speech fright than students in lower grades. Physiological test results (Wheelless, 1967) also showed increased apprehension between the third and sixth grades. In attempting to

identify and measure the CA construct, Garrison and Garrison (1979) found significant amounts of CA in fourth, fifth, and sixth grade children. Probing the school environment as a potential cause of increased CA, McCroskey et al. (1981) found children in lower elementary (K-3) grades to show less CA than children in upper elementary (4-6) grades. The study also revealed that the substantial increase appeared to occur during grades three and four. Because of the findings of these studies, further research to determine the levels of communication apprehension in children is needed to understand the causes, to prevent the development, and to provide appropriate treatment.

Etiology of Communication Apprehension

According to McCroskey and Richmond (1985), both heredity and environment are sources of trait-like phenomena such as communication apprehension. Evidence of heredity suggested from studies comparing identical twins indicate a trait of "sociability"; a child may inherit a tendency to be more or less sociable and be predisposed to a level of communication apprehension.

Although heredity may contribute significantly to the development of communication apprehension, environmental influences may have an even greater effect. Daly and Friedrich (1981) found that there may be three causes of the development of communication apprehension in early years: reinforcement, modeling, and oral communication skill acquisition. Psychological learning theories support the thesis that

if a child is encouraged or rewarded for talking, then he or she is likely to continue to improve those skills. Conversely, if the child is punished or unrewarded in oral communication, he or she will probably cease to develop these skills. Through modeling the child may imitate a quiet or more talkative role model. Additionally, the child may be taught social oral communication skills, use these skills, and continue to develop them. However, the child who does not have the opportunity to acquire, practice, and receive reinforcement from oral communication skills may avoid situations in which the skills are expected and withdraw further from opportunities for communication.

The home and school environments are the primary arenas for the development of communication skills. Differences in attitudes toward roles and status in a family, amounts of interpersonal interaction, and social habits and activities may profoundly affect whether or not a child communicates effectively. Since the classroom environment traditionally expects and maintains a low level of oral communication, the quiet child may fit easily into this setting and may even be reinforced by aversive stimuli given the more talkative students.

Culture, another possible influence contributing to communication apprehension, may include causal factors of both heredity and environment. Zimbardo (1977) and others have referred to the exigencies of cultural influence in contemporary society: worth associated with achievement, mobility among families, and economic status. Thus,

the value a culture places on communication may influence the degree to which CA may be detrimental to the individual. Culture appears to be a variable in the Elliot study (1968) in which shy children were found to come significantly more often from families of low socio-economic status. Grutzek (1970) also found that the children from rural backgrounds have more difficulty adjusting to the norms of the school setting than children from urban areas. Another cultural factor inhibiting communication is ethnicity. The highly ethnic home or community environment appears to contribute to dissonance with language use and social norms when attending school (Phillips & Butt, 1966).

Levels of communication apprehension differ among nationalities. A recent summary of Pacific Basin studies conducted at the University of Hawaii included college students from Australia, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Micronesia, the United States, and the People's Republic of China (Klopf, 1984). Apprehension among students varied significantly according to national origin, with Japanese students being most apprehensive and Korean students being least apprehensive.

Communication apprehension appears to be a concern and problem within many cultures; this concern underscores the need for further cross-cultural research. A major task in conducting such research is the development of "procedures [which] . . . account for the factors that might jeopardize the validity of the obtained data" (Klopf, 1984, p. 158). Of central importance is the selection or development of a

valid measure of communication apprehension across the cultures surveyed. In the Pacific Basin studies, the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1970) was found to be usable with English-speaking subjects who were not American. To assess the levels of communication apprehension in non-English speaking cultures, Klopff suggested the feasibility of translation of the CA measuring instrument to the native language and recommended bilingual usage procedures and native collaborators to insure accuracy.

Methods and Procedures

Subjects were 5- to 11-year-old elementary school children from Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA and Jonkoping, Sweden. The American sample of 136 males and 183 females included all students, ages 5-11, within one public elementary school. The Swedish sample of 207 males and 199 females included all students, ages 5-11, from selected representative classes in the public schools of Jonkoping.

Assessment of Communication Apprehension

The Personal Report of Communication Fear (PRCF) was used to measure levels of communication apprehension in the American and Swedish subjects. Developed by McCroskey et al. (1981), this 14-item self-report inventory is designed for children from grades K-12. In the development of the PRCF, reliabilites of .70 for grades K-3, .79 for grades 4-6, .84 for grades 7-9, and .90 for grades 10-12 were obtained. When the original measure of communication apprehension, the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, was used as the

criterion, the PRCF generated correlation coefficients of .63 for grades K-3, .98 for grades 4-6 and 7-9, and .95 for grades 10-12 (McCroskey et al., 1981).

Respondents to the PRCF are instructed to indicate the degree to which each item applies by indicating "YES" -- strongly agree; "yes" --agree; "?" -- unsure, "no" -- disagree; or "NO" -- strongly disagree. Administrators are instructed to read the scale to subjects below the seventh grade.

For American 5- to 8-year-old subjects, the classroom teacher administered the English version of the PRCF in groups of four to seven students. After reading the directions and discussing possible responses with the small group, the teacher administered the PRCF individually by reading each item and recording the student's response. For 9- to 11-year-old subjects, the classroom teacher distributed the inventories to the entire class and discussed the directions. Then the teacher read the items to the class and paused after each item for subjects to circle their response.

For Swedish subjects, the PRCF was translated into the native language by Hans Atterstrom, University College of Jonkoping, Sweden. Atterstrom translated the inventory as literally as possible and spatially disposed the writing in the same manner as the American version. Swedish teachers followed the same administration procedures as American teachers for 5- to 8-year-old and 9- to 11-year-old subjects.

Results

Scores on the Personal Report of Communication Fear were grouped for analysis according to the culture, gender, and age of subjects. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

A 2 (Culture: American vs. Swedish) x 2 (Age: 5- to 8-year-olds vs. 9- to 11-year-olds) x 2 (Gender: male vs. female) analysis of variance (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, and Bent, 1975) indicated significant main effects for culture, $p < .001$, and for age, $p < .01$. Swedish subjects reported a higher level of communication apprehension than did American subjects, and 9- to 11-year-olds (older subjects) reported a higher level of communication apprehension than did 5- to 8-year-olds (younger subjects). No significant main effect for gender and no significant 2-way interactions were found. However, a significant 3-way interaction (Group x Age x Gender), $p < .05$, was found. The results of the analysis of variance are reported in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Tukey post hoc analysis (Kirk, 1968) indicated the following significant mean differences, $p < .05$: Swedish older males reported higher levels of communication apprehension than did American younger males, American younger females, and American older males; and Swedish older females reported higher levels of communication apprehension than did American younger males (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

Thus, when all pairwise comparisons were made, the impact of culture in combination with age and gender was confirmed.

Discussion

Communication apprehension is known to affect the individual negatively in various ways. Educators and researchers seek to find causes of this condition in order to prevent development and provide methods of treatment. CA is found to be developed in the home and school environments and to be influenced by differences in culture. Although studies have attempted to measure CA in various cultures, few, if any, have dealt with elementary age subjects in their native language.

In this study, communication apprehension among elementary age subjects was explored. First, a significant main effect for culture was found, with Swedish subjects showing greater communication apprehension than did American subjects. Speculation as to the reason for this difference is aided by Atterstrom's comments about communication in the Swedish culture:

Sweden has a powerful state authority . . . which decides about the welfare of the Swedes. . . . Sweden is a very well-organized society. Different organizations, labor unions and popular movements are important parts of our society. This influences, I think, our ways of social communicating. It is--perhaps especially in Sweden--an advantage to belong to an interest group if you want to speak and have influence Swedes have an almost comical dependence on directions and rules

Swedes often have a deficient capacity or training to be flexible. . . . My personal opinion: Regarding the differences in apprehensive levels I may say that the Swedish children are not used to communicate so openly as the American children do--especially at school. The Swedish students are probably because of lack of practice more uncertain than afraid in oral communication.

These statements appear to indicate that the Swedish society is more rigid and controlled than is the American society. Such rigidity appears to contribute to apprehension or avoidance of communication.

Second, age appears to be a significant variable in the increase of communication apprehension. This study found older subjects to be more apprehensive than younger subjects. Apparently children learn to be more apprehensive toward communication as they grow and develop. Since this finding appears to be supported by other studies, serious implications of increase in communication apprehension by age are indicated. In order to prevent the development of debilitating effects of communication apprehension, educators need to seek causes and develop prevention and therapies suitable for children. The increase of CA by age may indicate a deficiency in recognition of the communication apprehension problem as well as a lack of educational provisions to alleviate the problem. Atterstrom indicates a lack of concern for communication apprehension in Swedish education:

The working (research, teaching, education) and the attitudes to a construct/phenomenon like CA have of course somewhat different tradition and direction in Sweden than in the US. For instance, in teacher education (or at college/university) you will very seldom find separate courses/training in communication. Until now oral communication mostly has been a matter for linguists, speech therapists and teachers in the Swedish language. As a consequence communication apprehension as a construct is unknown but speech anxiety quite well-known.

American educators in higher education appear to be recognizing the problem of communication apprehension and instituting alleviation programs in colleges and universities, but for the most part, little is done to provide general speech instruction for elementary children.

Third, although a significant interaction among the variables of culture, age, and gender was found in this study, no pattern of gender differences emerged. Differences in communication apprehension according to gender have been found in many US research studies, with females showing more apprehension than males. Usually, this variable is not the main research topic, but is ancillary to the major focus of the study. Further exploration of gender differences in communication apprehension through cultural and cross-cultural research would be in order.

The approach to this study was two-fold: the examination of elementary age subjects and the use of their native language. This study suggests significant amounts of apprehension to be developed and increased in early years and indicates the need for research and educational efforts with children and communication apprehension. Moreover, this may be a pioneer study for examining subjects in their native language for amounts of communication apprehension.

Suggestions for future general research in communication apprehension include: continuation of examination of elementary age subjects to determine appropriate prevention and therapy; and research efforts which further explore levels of communication apprehension according to gender. Cross-cultural research should be continued among elementary age subjects in their native language in order to determine cultural characteristics that may cause or prevent the development of communication apprehension. Additionally, since this study examined levels of CA in subjects from the US and Sweden, cultures in the so-called rationalistic, western culture, it would be interesting to compare global differences in communication apprehension between the philosophic-Confucianistic East and the rationalistic West.

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Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of PRCF
Scores for Cultures by Age Group and Gender

Age group/gender	Culture				Total	
	American <u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	Swedish <u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
5- to 8-year-olds						
Males	31.16	8.61	33.10	8.79	32.18	8.74
Females	31.66	7.45	34.28	8.45	33.10	8.10
Total	31.34	8.08	33.70	8.62	32.61	8.45
9- to 11-year-olds						
Males	31.73	9.05	36.35	7.28	34.18	8.50
Females	34.36	7.48	35.02	7.45	34.68	7.45
Total	33.05	8.38	35.74	7.37	34.42	7.98
Total sample by gender						
Males	31.42	8.80	34.61	8.27	33.11	8.66
Females	32.93	7.55	34.59	8.03	33.80	7.84
Total	32.14	8.25	34.60	8.14	33.43	8.28

Note. The greater the score, the greater the amount of CA.

Table 2
Analysis of Variance: PRCF Scores

Source of variation	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	Significance of <u>F</u>
Main effects					
Culture (C)	1186.81	1	1186.81	17.97	0.001
Age (A)	669.50	1	669.50	10.14	0.01
Gender (G)	107.80	1	107.80	1.63	
2-way interactions					
C X A	8.36	1	8.36	0.13	
C X G	99.08	1	99.08	1.50	
A X G	4.18	1	4.18	0.06	
3-way interactions					
C X A X G	255.97	1	255.97	3.88	0.05
Residual	50733.20	768	66.06		

Table 3
Tukey Post Hoc Analysis for PRCF Means by Group

Group**	Group						
	AYF	AOM	SYM	SYF	AOF	SOF	SOM
	q	q	q	q	q	q	q
AYM M = 31.16	0.50	0.57	1.94	3.12	3.20	3.84*	5.19*
AYF M = 31.66		0.07	1.44	2.61	2.69	3.36	4.69*
AOM M = 31.73			1.37	2.54	2.62	3.29	4.62*
SYM M = 33.10				1.18	1.26	1.93	3.25
SYF M = 34.28					0.08	0.75	2.07
AOF M = 34.36						0.67	2.00
SOF M = 35.02							1.33

*p < .05.

**AYM = American younger males.
AYF = American younger females.
AOM = American older males.
AOF = American older females.

SYM = Swedish younger males.
SYF = Swedish younger females.
SOM = Swedish older males.
SOF = Swedish older females.